

SAFE WINTER DRIVING TIPS

Plan ahead. Driving in bad weather usually takes longer and is more stressful. If you did not leave more time to reach your destination and are consequently running late, this will only increase your stress level and could adversely affect your driving. Also, check the weather before you leave. If you can take an alternate route to avoid the brunt of a weather system, do so. You may also want to consider postponing your trip until the weather has improved. If you decide not to postpone, carry a map with you to prevent getting lost when visibility is low, and to show you alternate routes if necessary.

Drive Slowly. This decreases the chance of skids and accidents.

Leave Room In Front. Many experts recommend doubling the “cushion” between you and the car in front of you when you are driving in rain, snow, sleet, etc. Brake time is slower in these conditions,

and you must allow yourself more room. Make Sure Your Equipment is in Working Order. Have your tires and brakes checked more frequently in the winter months. Make sure your windshield wipers are in working order and that your headlights are clean. Dirty headlights can significantly reduce visibility, especially in bad weather. Clear your windshield and mirrors of ice or frost before leaving, and keep them clear with your wipers and wiper fluid during the trip. If you need to pull over to scrape ice or snow, be sure to do so in a safe place.

Use Your Low Beams in Fog. Turn on your headlights (make sure to use your low beams, not your high beams) in fog, whether you are driving through it at night OR during the day. Your low beam headlights not only help you to see, but also help other cars to see you. It is also very important to maintain a large following distance in fog and to drive slowly, as you

may not see things like another car or a traffic light until it is nearly upon you. Stay close to the right hand side of the road in fog to avoid going over the center line into oncoming traffic.

Buckle Up! Be sure you and your passengers wear seat belts at all times. Not only is it the law in most states, it can also save lives, especially when driving in bad weather.

Pull Over if You Need to. If you are tired or delaying traffic pull over. Don't be afraid of the time you may “waste” by pulling over, it's certainly a better risk than that of getting in an accident. Also, if the weather is suddenly particularly bad, it may be a good idea to find a safe place to pull off the road and try to wait out the bad spell. If the poor weather involves deep snow or heavy rain, be sure you are not pulling over into a deep puddle or snow bank.



Compliance Corner

Fighting Fraud is Everyone's Job

I watched a great documentary called Fruitcake Fraud. The story centers on a bakery in Texas, specializing in Fruitcake. Over a 9-year period a trusted employee embezzled over \$16 million dollars. He spent millions on pricy cars, travel, jewelry, and watches. People in the small town of Corsicana quietly questioned his extravagant lifestyle, but they believed his explanations for how he had come into money. When the company had a two-year period with no profits that they decided to take a closer look at the financials. That's when a newly hired accountant discovered a check written to a bank the bakery didn't have a relationship with. The first thing she did was show the discrepancy to her boss who, being the person committing the fraud, had a plausible explanation. The accountant, being a new employee was uncomfortable moving forward with her suspicion, but she couldn't let it go. She continued to quietly investigate until she had enough evidence to prove that fraud had been committed.

The National Health Care Anti-Fraud Association estimates conservatively that health care fraud costs the nation \$68 billion annually. An estimated 43% of fraud is detected by way of a tip. To illustrate the importance of VA whistleblowers here are a few recent cases of fraud discovered because VA employees spoke-up.

In Ohio a former Inventory Manager was found guilty of fraudulently ordering medical supplies and equipment from a vendor he created. To conceal his scheme, he lied to government officials and falsified patient records. The investigation into possible illegal activities began after the Cleveland Compliance Officer received an allegation of wrongdoing.

A Michigan VA nurse was charged with stealing COVID-19 vaccination cards. As part of the vaccination team, she had access to the cards and used social media to sell them. The facility was tipped off to the scam and notified OIG who investigated.

In North Carolina a veteran who claimed to be blind due to military service plead guilty to health care fraud. While receiving compensation for service-related blindness the veteran registered over 30 different motor vehicles, renewed his driver's license, and served as a BB gun and archery instructor for the Boy Scouts. The VA was tipped off to the fraud after the veteran was observed driving to and from his appointments at the VA clinic.

In these cases, the fraud was discovered after individuals noticed something was wrong and spoke-up. The VA is committed to protecting the integrity of its healthcare delivery system and they will diligently investigate any potential criminal activity. But it cannot be done without the diligence of VA employees and Veterans who speak up when something isn't right. It takes us all to combat fraud. If you see something, say something.

The OIG hotline receives, screens, and determines the disposition of complaints concerning Veterans or VA that relate to potentially unlawful activity or potential violations of rules/regulation; fraud, waste, or abuse; and gross mismanagement of VA programs and operations. OIG Hotline number is 1-800-488-8244. Whistleblowers are protected from retaliation under the No FEAR Act of 2002.

If you have questions or concerns please contact me Deborah.reinhart@va.gov or 208-422-1267.

COMPLIANCE CORNER



BOISE is HIGHLY RELIABLE

HRO PRINCIPLES & VALUES

THEME OF THE MONTH
Clear Communications

December 2021 | National Safety Poster

Coordinating Care on a Good Catch

C

CONTEXT

Angela Daniel, a Patient Safety Manager at the VA West Texas Healthcare System, reviewed a Veteran's chart for a JPSR submission. During that review, she noticed a consult in the chart on the same date. She recognized the urgency for the Veteran to be seen given their age and condition. The consult had a routine status, meaning there was a 30-day window to schedule the Veteran for follow-up.

A

ACTION

Angela was concerned that she could not locate any additional documentation for the consult. She wanted to clarify the situation to ensure the Veteran received quality and timely care. Angela contacted the nursing team to express her concerns. The Community Care Services (CCS) team immediately scheduled the Veteran's follow-up. She also added the event to the original JSPR to "close the loop" and minimize the chances of further communication breakdown.

R

RESULTS

The CCS nurse thanked Angela for her Clear Communications and dedication to Veteran care. Promoting open communication helps empower others to speak up. Additionally, Angela's focus on the Veteran helped to clarify actions needed to provide them high-quality care.



Our open communication... has helped us empower others to speak up and work on continuous process improvement.

Angela Daniel, RN, BSN
Patient Safety Manager
VA West Texas Healthcare System

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

For more information, visit: http://bit.ly/HighReliability_sp

VHA'S JOURNEY TO
HIGH
RELIABILITY

Your Care is Our Mission.

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH **DECEMBER**



Kimberly Barker

"Ms. Kimberly Barker is the Program Manager for the Non-Institutional Care (NIC) Programs. That title however, does not begin to describe all the things that Ms. Barker does on behalf of the Boise VAMC and Veterans. As Program Manager for NIC she provides oversight for the Homemaker/Home Health Aide, Respite, Adult Day Healthcare, Purchased Skilled, Bowel and Bladder, and Home Hospice Programs. These programs combined have provided over 850 Veterans with services that help keep Veterans in their homes and increase their safety in that environment. Recently she oversaw the recertification of services for over 300 Veterans ensuring no lapse in care. She is currently involved in implementing some major changes in how hours are calculated as mandated by VACO to ensure Veterans retain the services they are entitled to. For Contract Nursing Home she currently oversees services to 28 Veterans in 19 different contracted homes. This has become even more critical to our Veterans with the limitations to CLC admissions imposed by COVID. Most recently she managed the placement of a Veteran out of our area and then ensured a smooth transition when he changed Nursing Homes. Between the two programs, Ms. Barker helps to manage over \$6M in spending. Of note Ms. Barker is the only one in the VISN that manages both programs. Ms. Barker also acts as Timekeeper for NIC personnel. Most recently she has navigated the VATAS inputs for a provider on FMLA who is now retiring shortly. Her attention to detail is second to none as demonstrated by her acting on an input from a Veteran's spouse and discovering a significant overpayment to an agency for Respite services. Her diligent efforts helped to resolve the issue, keep the agency with us, and resulted in repayment of over \$131K back to the VA. Whether it is dealing with programs as a whole, individual agencies, or helping a Veteran navigate the system, Ms. Barker's contribution to the care and welfare of our Veterans is truly noteworthy."

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH **DECEMBER**



Maria Rodriguez

In the summer of 2021 Maria volunteered to coordinate the process for the Boise VAMC to gain access to a new system the Department of Justice offered called the Justice Web Interface to NCIC (JWIN) system. Maria played a vital part of developing this program. Maria's hard work paid off big in October 2021. An unforeseen problem resulted in the Boise VA instantly losing access to the State of Idaho database which had been used for many years. Due to Maria's prior hard work to shorten the onboarding process for JWIN, the VA was able to immediately transition from testing to full use of the JWIN system. If not for Maria's early efforts to implement the JWIN system even when it was not immediately needed, the Boise VA would currently not have access to any law enforcement databases. Maria being an Army veteran has an appreciation and respect for the veterans the VA serves, Maria is a terrific reflection of the VA's five core values (I CARE). Every day Maria exhibits Integrity in her duties and dedication to get her work done properly, Commitment to the VA and Police Service to be a team player and accomplish the mission, Advocacy as Maria is a veteran and works to help other veterans, Respect is shown in everything Maria does by the way Maria communicates and treats others, and Excellence by being a model employee for others to follow. All of these traits can be seen on an hourly basis as Maria goes about her daily duties.

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH **DECEMBER**



Belinda Childers

Belinda Childers serves as one of the ICU RNs on our night shift team. Working alongside Belinda during the last COVID surge, I've gotten to see how much she cares for all of the ICU patients. Belinda is one of the first people to help jump into any room, COVID or not, to help the primary RN, whether it be admitting patients, intubating, proning or supinating, helping troubleshoot equipment concerns, and responding to critical alarms, or you name it. In times of COVID, team nursing has required all hands on deck to help provide patients the necessary care, and Belinda has been an excellent model of that behavior. Our team is lucky to have Belinda with her critical care and cardiac knowledge and experience. She's been precepting a student over the last few months. These last few months have been incredibly challenging to our nursing staff and Belinda still shows up with a great attitude, ready to work. Thanks Belinda for all you do!

Belinda excels at all the ICARE values. I admire her commitment to each of the ICU patients, whether they are assigned to her or not to provide quality recommendations and jump in to help with emergent situations. Watching her as a resource in the ICU, it is clear how she helps advocate for each of the patients we've served.

One of her COVID patients was deteriorating one night, and Belinda was able to recognize these changes quickly and provide recommendations to the medical team, which was able to help the Veteran turn the corner again during his lengthy, complicated hospital stay. This COVID patient ended up living and is currently in rehab. Belinda, thanks for being such a critical resource to our ICU team and providing excellent care to all our patients!